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ABSTRACT

This kit provides a summary of a scholarly paper, discussion questions, and activities to promote constructive debate between scholars and ethnic and minority groups about the changing role of the neighborhood in American society. The materials focus on the Chicago area, but the issues and problems apply to any urban area. The paper traces the development of the neighborhood in terms of cultural and social interaction among its resident ethnic groups. Conflict of ethnic heritage with the pervading Protestant ethic resulted in confused identity for many people, and the Progressive Movement of the early 20th century encouraged the assimilation of ethnic identity into an American norm. Current urban renewal projects and movement of some classes to the suburbs are creating more changes in the dynamics of city neighborhoods. Questions to consider include the ability of racial groups to cooperate with ethnic groups, responsiveness of ethnic neighborhoods to bureaucratic politics instead of ward politics, values of ethnic pluralism as opposed to assimilation of ethnicity, and the role of service organizations in neighborhood development. Related activities involve small groups in (1) comparing elementary texts of the 1950s ("Dick and Jane") with contemporary books that have a multiethnic, blurred sex-role approach or (2) identifying social issues in which ethnic groups have vested interests and role-playing the concerns of those groups. (AV)

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THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

"CONTROVERSIAL ISSUES KIT" No. 1

Based on an essay by Ronald Grossman,
Lake Forest College and Len Calabrese,
Northwestern University

Kit developed by C. Frederick Risinger
Indiana University, Bloomington

June, 1976

Issued as part of the Project, "Bridge-Building Between Scholars and Chicago's Ethnic and Minority Communities." Supported by a grant from the American Issues Forum Chicago, a program of the National Endowment for the Humanities.

Ronald Grossman
Project Director

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INTRODUCTION

These "Controversial Issues Kits" were produced by the Institute on Pluralism and Group Identity for a project entitled BRIDGE-BUILDING BETWEEN SCHOLARS AND CHICAGO'S ETHNIC AND MINORITY COMMUNITIES. The project was made possible by a grant from the American Issues Forum Chicago, a program developed for the nation's Bicentennial under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Humanities and with the co-sponsorship of the American Revolution Bicentennial Administration.

When the American Issues Forum announced its mandate to bring Americans together to "discuss issues that excite debate among us," the Institute could think of no two parties who were more in need of a constructive debate than scholars, and ethnic and minority groups. On the one hand there is a tendency among scholars and other professionals to regard ethnic, minority and neighborhood groups not as rich resources for solving human problems, but as problems in themselves. On the other hand, ethnic, minority, and women's groups and neighborhood organizations are all becoming increasingly vocal in demanding that "elite professionals" including scholars and others who design and administer educational, mental care and neighborhood services respond within the cultural norms of the group.

Clearly what is needed is a new partnership built around a pluralist ethic that respects both professional training and expertise, and the everyday experience and common sense of people.

To accomplish this goal, the Institute convened a seminar of Chicago-based scholars with an interest in contemporary urban problems. Several scholars were commissioned to author papers on various public policy issues suggested by the American Issues Forum nine-month calendar, and known to be of concern to the ethnic and minority groups that work with the Institute on Pluralism and Group Identity. A preliminary draft of the papers was shared with leaders of community groups, who then invited several scholars to attend their regular business meetings and to debate the issues in the papers with their members. The insights gleaned from these discussions were incorporated into a revised version of the papers which then became the basis for the "Controversial Issues Kits."

The Kits include a summary of the scholarly papers as modified by the experience of sharing them with the community groups, a series of discussion questions raised by the issues in the paper, suggested group activities, and a guide for running discussions.

It is the Institute's hope that these "Kits" will generate an even wider circle of debate among us, since they contain both the expertise of the scholars and the everyday experience of community groups. It is also hoped that this project will serve as a model for a new approach to cooperation between scholars and community groups, one that allows each to play more fulfilling roles in relation to the other.

The Kit, "Women in Working Class Ethnic Communities," originated in a paper by Dr. Kathleen McCourt of the National Opinion Research Center and Loyola University; the Kit, "Group Identity, Multiethnicity and Cultural Variations in Education," originated in a paper by Dr. Isidro Lucas of the University of Chicago; the Kit, "The Neighborhood and American Society," originated in a paper by Professors Ronald Grossman of Lake Forest College, and Len Calabrese of Northwestern University. The Kits themselves are the work of C. Frederick Risinger, Coordinator for School Social Studies at Indiana University, Bloomington. Secretarial and editorial assistance were provided by Patricia Ann Eckman and Lynn Marie Kloczek.

The Institute on Pluralism and Group Identity grew out of the American Jewish Committee's pioneering National Project on Ethnic America. Established in 1968 to develop public policy approaches to issues which bridge differences between groups, the Project has been recognized for deepening the public's understanding of the legitimate needs and concerns of ethnic and working-class populations. As the Project grew into the Institute in 1974, its initial focus on ethnicity was broadened to include a consideration of how ethnicity is modified by other identity factors such as class, sex, religion, and region. The Institute works through local and national networks of the social service professions, the educational community, neighborhood groups, the government, and ethnic, minority, feminist and intergroup relations agencies.

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THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND AMERICAN SOCIETY

"Where do you live?" That's a question that all of us frequently answer. The way we answer it tells us a great deal about the importance of urban neighborhoods in American society. If you live in Park Forest, Des Plaines, or Deerfield, you can usually reply, "In the suburbs." If you want to be a little more specific you can say, "In the south suburbs," or "Up on the North Shore." But what if you live in the city? Do you say, "I live in Chicago"? Not very often (except if you're out of town or talking to out-of-towners). Usually you'll say something like "58th and Wabash"...or "St. Dominic's"...or "Damen and Lawrence." In other words, while many suburbs are so similar that specific names mean very little, most city neighborhoods are unique with each having an identity of its own. Most American cities are collections of these neighborhoods, and if we are going to understand the growth and development of the nation, we must examine the origin, evolution, and impact of urban neighborhoods.

European cities do not have "neighborhoods" in the American sense of the word. When industrialization occurred in Europe, cities grew tremendously--out with Germans in Hamburg, the French in Paris, and the British in Birmingham. In America, industrialization took place at the same time that successive waves of Europeans and Asians emigrated to these shores. For reasons of language, custom, religion, and other ethnic factors, these immigrants settled in specific areas. Each growing city became a patchwork quilt of many ethnic neighborhoods. To these new Americans, the neighborhood was more important than the total city. Their economic, political, social and psychological needs were met by both the formal and informal institutions of the neighborhood and extended family.

Whether Polish, Italian, Jewish, Latino, or Black, neighborhoods developed similar patterns of social interaction and identity. The streets of the neighborhood are not just its boundaries--they become the arena in which the ethnic group communicates, shares its cultural identity, socializes new members, and makes political decisions. The inside of the home is shared with only the family and most intimate friends, but the interaction in the streets binds the neighborhood together--closer in many ways than the more widely known culture of small-town America.

Many ethnic groups identify themselves as much by religion as by language or geographic origin. This is especially true of Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox ethnic groups, but also applies to Jewish neighborhoods and Protestant neighborhoods like the Swedish and Norwegian communities along Montrose and Foster Avenues. The parish, temple, or church became, along with the local political organization, a major service provider for the community. For example, St. Stanislaw Kostka, the largest Polish parish in the country, operated at its peak a 4,000 student elementary school, a high school and college, a daily Polish-language newspaper, a savings and loan association and credit union, theater and musical clubs, athletic teams, and many other organizations and services--even including informal welfare-type programs for members who were unemployed or otherwise "down on their luck."

Yet, for all of the social and economic importance of urban ethnic neighborhoods to American society, the commonly accepted view of American culture was shaped by the values or ideas of the rural and small-town tradition--commonly known as the "Protestant Ethic." This view of human nature and of the nation was that people are divided into the "good" (those who conform to the moral standards of the small-town society) and the "evil" (those who cannot conform morally and deserve to be

"cast out"). Many of the most well known American novels deal with non-conforming rural or small-town resident who leaves for the non-conformist, and therefore less moral, city.

The urban neighborhood imposed a kind of conformity, too; but it was more cultural than moral. The neighborhood philosophy of human nature assumed that each person possessed both good and evil qualities. One instance of non-conforming moral behavior did not necessarily doom the neighborhood resident (and the family) to perpetual shame and ostracism.

Yet during the late 1800's and early 1900's, when the influence of the neighborhood on its residents was most profound, the dominant culture of small-town America determined what was considered the "right way to live." The Dick, Jane and Sally readers, the escapades of the Bobsey Twins, and countless other influences told neighborhood youths that the "real America" existed beyond the city limits. The upwardly mobile Jewish, Ukrainian, or Irish boy or girl must have thought (or learned) that the only way to be truly successful in America was to leave the neighborhood.

Attitudes like those described above were accentuated even more by the ideas of the Progressive Movement in the first 25 years of the Twentieth Century. Although the Progressives were considered "reformers," they frequently believed the way to reform America was to apply the efficient, "clean" and centralized decision-making models of corporate America to big-city America. However, the patchwork quilt of semi-autonomous neighborhoods was a major obstacle to their efforts. Before this, politics was a neighborhood occupation. City-wide issues were unimportant compared to the problems of the family, neighborhood and the immigrant and migrant group. But the attacks of the inefficiency and corruption of big city politics turned out to be attacks on neighborhood politics and on the people who lived there, too.

Combined with the Progressive reformist demands for a new urban political structure was also an attack on ethnic identity. The leadership of the Progressive movement was composed primarily of intellectuals and civic and business leaders from Anglo Saxon, Protestant America. To these intellectuals, ethnicity was a "problem," like political corruption, to be "solved." Even though many stressed tolerance toward other religions and cultural values, they did not support the idea of a pluralist society. Instead, ethnicity was merely a "way station" to inevitable assimilation, and acculturation. The concept of the melting pot was too powerful for the intellectuals. Moreover, even those intellectuals with ethnic and neighborhood roots were attracted to the assimilationist view. In short, the ethnic neighborhood was considered by many Americans as a temporary step toward assimilation at best, and as a dangerous breeding ground for radical and un-American ideas by many.

In many ways, the mass exodus from the cities, which took place in the 1950's and 1960's has led to a "whole new ballgame" regarding ethnic groups and neighborhoods. Some of the older suburbs (like some of those in South Cook County and in Will County) have taken on an ethnic identity. Urban renewal projects have "jumbled-up" many of the ethnic neighborhoods in the city. A few of the newer suburbs seem to be developing some of the close interaction patterns usually associated with the neighborhood. We seem to be at a turning point and several important questions will be answered during the next decade. Some of the most significant issues are:

1. Will the suburbs take on "neighborhood identity" patterns similar to the old ethnic lifestyles, or was the neighborhood only a temporary phase in American history?
2. Will the "passing along" of neighborhoods from one ethnic group to another continue? In the past, as one group prospered and moved away from the city's central core, other groups moved in. In some cases formal and informal structures like the church, neighborhood taverns, and political clubs eased the transition. Will this continue or will recent changes--particularly the shift from white ethnic to Black and Latino neighborhoods--result in a break with the past?
3. Will white ethnic neighborhood groups find ways to cooperate with Black and Latinos who have developed their own ethnic and neighborhood identities? Often, Irish, Jewish, Polish and other groups have been able to bridge their differences when confronted with common problems. Will racial barriers prove more insurmountable than barriers of ethnicity, language and religion?
4. Finally, can ethnic neighborhoods master the art of the new bureaucratic politics? The politics of the 1970's do not rely much on the ballot box. Instead, research grants, federal-state bureaucracies, and private foundations determine policy. Will ethnic neighborhood organizations be able to master the terminology and techniques of the "New Politics" as effectively as they learned to master the art of neighborhood ward politics?

THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND AMERICAN SOCIETY
-DISCUSSION QUESTIONS-

1. What is the basis for the following statement? "Ethnic neighborhoods are primarily a creation of the American industrialization period."
2. Describe how the ethnic neighborhood provided essential social, economic health and cultural services for its citizens. Has this changed in recent years? Would people be better served if more services were provided by local community and neighborhood groups instead of by metropolitan, state, or federal agencies?
3. One of the significant points of the paper was the historic "conflict" between the lifestyles of the urban ethnic neighborhood and the image of America as a small-town, middle-class, white, Protestant nation. Do you have any personal recollections concerning this "conflict"? Is the image of what America is (or should be) changing?
4. Historians usually refer to the political and social reforms of the Twentieth Century's first 25 years as the "Progressive Era." A few of its achievements were reforms in urban government, reducing the power of some big businesses, and improving the status of women and other minorities. Yet, this paper points out that their efforts damaged the concept of ethnic and neighborhood identity and pluralism. How did this occur?
5. Describe the differences between the view of ethnicity as a temporary "way station" and the view of ethnic pluralism as a valuable resource that should be conserved. Which view do you favor? Why?
6. Can you identify some issues or problems in the Chicago area that might provide a "bridge" for cooperative efforts between ethnic and minority neighborhoods and organizations? Which ones seem to be the most likely "bridge issues"?
7. Can you, or anyone in your group, list examples of neighborhoods being "passed along" from one ethnic group to another? Can you describe how this process of "ethnic succession" is occurring? Which organizations, businesses and service agencies were "passed along" with the shift in residential occupation? Which were not, and why not? Do some groups have an easier time than others in assuming control of services and organizations run by previous groups? If so, why?

-DISCUSSION QUESTIONS-

8. Many former ethnic neighborhood residents have moved to the outlying suburbs. In many cases, these families are cut off from close contact with their relatives and friends from the old neighborhood. Should they work hard to maintain these ties, or should they concentrate their efforts on developing close relationships with their new neighbors?
9. Many people argue that an ethnically pluralistic America is an important goal to achieve. Which is more likely to lead to that goal: 1) living in an ethnic neighborhood or strongly ethnic suburb like Berwyn or South Holland, or 2) living in a mixed suburb, like Bloomingdale, where little attention is paid to ethnic identity?
10. Do you think that "human service professionals" should learn how to make better use of the strengths in families, neighborhoods and in ethnic and minority groups? Or to put it another way, how can treatment methods incorporate the family, neighborhood, ethnic and minority group, rather than tear them down?
11. Do you think that it would help neighborhoods if we could find a way to convince professionals and institutions in the human service fields to see themselves as contributing to strong, healthy neighborhoods, rather than only responding to sickness? Why?
12. What are the costs (both long and short term) to families, neighborhoods and to society in general of our failure to provide services that are keyed to the wide variety of people, organizations, values and life styles found in neighborhoods?

THE NEIGHBORHOOD AND AMERICAN SOCIETY
-ACTIVITIES-

These first three activities are interrelated and could be used individually or as three separate sessions. Each activity would require about thirty minutes to one hour to complete. Therefore, they would require a fairly long session, or each could be effectively used as the program for three separate meetings. The activities require a chalkboard or poster paper for each sub-group to make lists and plans. Poster paper (butcher paper works fine for this), is good because it can be saved for later sessions and for note-taking.

1. Listed below are several organizations, groups, and businesses that have helped preserve ethnic identity in urban areas. Divide the group into sub-groups of four to six people. Give each group a deck of "3x5" cards with the name of one of the following categories listed on each card. Each sub-group should rank them in order of importance for the function of preserving ethnic identity. For example, if the groups would disappear tomorrow, which one would cause the biggest loss of ethnic identity?
 - a. Social and athletic clubs
 - b. Churches
 - c. Public schools
 - d. Ethnic oriented grocery stores, bakeries, etc.
 - e. Political clubs and party organizations
 - f. Parochial schools
 - g. Service and veteran's organizations (Rotary, Polish Vets, etc.)
 - h. Ethnic oriented banks and savings associations
 - i. Ethnic newspapers
 - j. Neighborhood bars
 - k. Other ethnic businesses (insurance, clothing stores, etc.)
 - l. Ethnic business associations.
 - m. Ethnic women's groups not related to the church

After all the groups finish, they should report to the total group. Work toward a consensus agreement about the "most important" five or six.

2. This activity uses the agreed-upon five or six organizations, groups, or businesses determined in the above activity. Divide once more into sub-groups of four to six people--preferably different groups than those in Activity #1. Each group should list the activities and services that the organization or business provides that help preserve ethnic identity and hold the community together. Then, using the "brainstorming" technique, have each group list additional services or functions that these organizations or businesses could provide. (Brainstorming simply means listing as many ideas as you can. All ideas that are offered must be listed. Don't take time to discuss or evaluate them. That comes later.)

ACTIVITIES

After brainstorming, return to the list and discuss each idea briefly. Each group should come up with a list of five to seven ideas that: 1) are possible, and 2) would help preserve and unite the ethnic heritage of the group.

Have the sub-groups report to the total group again. Try to identify four to six similar new ideas from each group's brainstorming session.

3. This activity is based on the two previous ones. Divide the group into different sub-groups of four to six people. Each group should be given one or two of the best "new ideas" for encouraging ethnicity that were developed in the brainstorming session. (One idea per group is best--but if your total group is less than fifteen or so, you may have to assign two ideas to each group.) Their task is to develop a "plan" for "institutionalizing" the idea in the community. The plan should be written on poster paper or on a chalkboard. For example, if one of the ideas was an ethnic carnival where customs, foods, clothing, music, etc., would be featured, the sub-group should plan who would be the best group or groups to organize it; when and where it should be held; who would be invited; how it would be financed; and similar issues.

The groups could then report to the total group. Special attention should be given to taking complete notes of these plans. Hopefully, they can be used as the basis for actual "action programs" within the neighborhood or community.

4. This activity takes a little preparation. Ask local teachers, librarians, and principals if they can provide you with some of the elementary texts from the 1950's or earlier. The "Dick and Jane," "Bobbsey Twins," "Sally and Spot," and all the other series are good. Then round up some of the more recently published elementary texts or library books for children, ages 6-12. If your school doesn't have the most recent materials, contact local publishing representatives. Scott, Foresman in Glenview, or SRA in Chicago might be able to help you; and both Allyn and Bacon, and Houghton, Mifflin have good elementary programs and Chicago-based representatives. Divide the group into sub-groups of six to eight and distribute one or more books from each, etc. Have them note the differences between the presentation of racial, ethnic, and sexual identities and roles. The groups should especially watch for pictures of different ethnic groups, names, activities of boys and girls, occupations of the fathers, and whether or not the women were depicted as working women, working mothers, or housewives. The sub-groups should then report to the total group. A discussion of the perceived differences should be held. Questions such as "Does changing the pictures do any good?" or "Is it good for the sex roles of textbook boys and girls to be 'blurred?'" should result in interesting discussions.

ACTIVITIES

5. This activity will focus on one major issue or problem facing the Chicago urban/suburban area. If your particular group is one which has a relatively narrow focus--such as a P.T.A. organization; or a group formed because of a specific issue, like to oppose or support the Crosstown Expressway--your issue or problem is probably identified already. On the other hand, your group might have a more general focus, such as the League of Women Voters or an ethnic veterans group. If so, you will need to identify a major problem for this activity. One good way would be to use the sub-group/main group technique used in Activity #1. Let each sub-group discuss issues such as flight to the suburbs, mass transit, neighborhood crime, or poor schools, and report back to the total group. Then, work for agreement on the issue.

Once the issue or problem is determined, use the brainstorming session described in Activity #2, and list all the ethnic groups that are concerned with the issue and should be involved in any proposed solution. Some disagreements will probably arise, but work for a consensus of the various ethnic, racial and religious groups who have a stake in the issue.

Next, divide the total group into smaller groups--each representing one of the ethnic groups. Ask them to "role-play" as best as possible that they are members of that group. (This part of the activity is difficult, but very valuable.) They should discuss and record what they think the answers would be to the following questions:

- a. How is "our" group involved in the issue?
- b. What is the history of "our" involvement?
- c. How could the issue or problem best be solved from "our" group's viewpoint?
- d. What other ethnic groups would we be willing to cooperate with in a joint effort to reach a solution?
- e. What other ethnic groups would we refuse to work with? Why?

Have each sub-group report to the total group. Everyone should try to identify areas of common concern and groups that would appear to be able to cooperate, if conditions were right. The next step would be to identify strategies to initiate and encourage such cooperation. This could be done by small groups again, or as a total group project. Try to end this activity (which would require about an hour) with an "action plan"--something that would lead to further discussion and, hopefully, cooperative meetings with other groups or organizations.

6. This activity is directly related to the previous one. If the sub-groups identified ethnic or minority groups that they believed would not work with other groups, you might decide

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-ACTIVITIES-

on an effort to understand the root causes of the opposition and then develop strategies for reducing or managing it--where that seems possible. This activity would probably best be done by the total group, unless it numbers more than 30-40 participants. Using the "brainstorming" idea again (see Activity #2), identify as many reasons as possible for the opposition of one group to another and then the possible ways to manage, limit or actually reduce the opposition. Don't try to "overpower" the feelings of opposition--that will just make them stronger. Instead, try to reduce feelings of fear or animosity.

Select the "best" three to five ideas and devise "action plans" to implement them. You might want to use sub-groups for this part of the activity.

7. Do a written and pictorial "historical study" of a Chicago neighborhood that has been "passed along" to two or more ethnic groups. If your group is a present or previous resident of the neighborhood, so much the better. Find old pictures showing stores or churches with different languages or goods being shown. Talk to school officials and church leaders about the evolution of the neighborhood and what the changes meant to them. Interview old and new residents. Collect and arrange the final results in a big scrapbook. Better yet, find a local business or organization like a bank, a school or a church, that would be willing to display the pictures and interviews on bulletin boards, showcases, or in windows. Not only will this activity be informative and interesting, but it will help all community residents realize that ethnic succession and "changing neighborhoods" are a normal development in American urban life. It will also help people see that all groups tend to use the same types of businesses and organizations as unifying forces and as problem-solving agents, although they may use them in different ways and for different reasons.